

**Fi in Gulf Pidgin Arabic**

*Eric Potsdam and Mohammad Alanazi*

*University of Florida and Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University*

1. **Introduction**

Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) is a simplified communication system established by the non-Arabic immigrants to Gulf countries in the Middle East. In the past decades, millions of people with no Arabic skills have come from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines for job opportunities. They needed to try to speak Arabic in order to communicate with their employers and this communication system has evolved into a pidgin. GPA is based on Gulf Arabic (GA), the variety of Arabic spoken in the Gulf states: Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and nearby areas (Lewis, Simons, Fennig 2013). Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010 further discuss the sociolinguistic situation of GPA.

The syntax of GPA has been little studied in the linguistic literature, except in the preceding references. One aspect of the morphosyntax that has been commented on is the morpheme *fi*. *Fi* in GPA derives from the Arabic morpheme *fii(h)* found in existential sentences. The goal of this paper is to propose a unified analysis of *fi* in GPA. A typical use of *fi* is given in (1), compared to a similar sentence in GA, (2).

(1) \[fi\ aqlam\ baqala\] GPA

\[fi\ pen.M.PL\ grocery\]

‘There are pens in the grocery.’

(2) \[fii(h)\ aqlam\ fi\ albaqala\] GA

\[fii(h)\ pen. M.PL\ in\ the.grocery\]

‘There are pens in the grocery.’

We propose that *fi* is a copula verb in GPA and has a function similar to *be* in English, building on proposals in Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010. It is a marker of predication, which links the subject and a non-verbal predicate. We argue against other proposed uses of *fi* however from these same sources. We show that it is not an expletive subject (Smart 1990, Næss 2008), a verb of possession ‘have’ (Smart 1990, Bakir 2010), or a tense-aspect-mood (TAM) marker (Næss 2008, Bakir 2010). Direct evidence comes from GPA data, while indirect evidence comes from the structure of substrate languages Hindi and Gulf Arabic.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the related form *fii(h)* in GA, a substrate language for GPA, as it seems clear that GPA borrowed *fi* from GA. Section 3 documents proposed uses for *fi* in GPA based on previous descriptions (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, and Bakir 2010). Section 4 lays out our unified structural analysis of GPA *fi* as a verb that introduces a non-verbal predication and argues against suggestions that it is an expletive subject,

---

1 Glossing abbreviations follow the Leipzig glossing conventions. We adapted some examples from the original works and transcription/glossing follow the original sources; however, we extracted more authentic examples of GPA from recorded conversations with immigrants who work in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The examples of GA are elicited from native GA speakers.
possessive verb ‘have’, or a TAM marker. We also address apparent cases of fi co-occurring with other verbs which seem to cast doubt on our proposal. Section 5 concludes.

2. *Fi(h) in Gulf Arabic*

It is necessary to discuss the status of *fi* in GA before addressing its status in GPA, as it seems evident that GPA *fi* was borrowed from GA in some form (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, Bakir 2010). First, *fi* has a use as a locative preposition:

(3) a. huwa killah *fi* l-maktab
   he always in the-office M.SG
   ‘He is always at the office.’ (Holes 1990:56)

   b. shifna safiina shkuburha *fi* l-miina
      saw.1PL ship F.SG what.size.its in the-port
      ‘We saw a really big ship in the port.’ (Holes 1990:61)

*Fi* has a second, diachronically related, use in existential sentences, (4). We gloss *fi* here as ‘COP’ and propose that it is a copula verb following Qafisheh 1977:200, Holes 1990:72, and Næss 2008:79.

(4) a. *fi* gahwa waayid
    COP coffee.FEM much
    ‘There is a lot of coffee.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (15))

   b. *fi* ṭamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood
      COP tomatoes.FEM.PL in the-greenhouse the-big
      ‘There are tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (16))

   c. *fi* siyaraat fi al-jamiah
      COP car.FEM.PL at the-university
      ‘There are cars at the university.’

   d. *fi* shirta daxil
      COP police.FEM.SG inside
      ‘There are police inside.’

Evidence for the verbal status of *fi* in GA comes from two areas: negation and its use with the auxiliary *kaan*. Negation in GA takes one of three relevant forms (Holes 1990:71-73, Næss 2008:69-71). It is *ma* with perfective or imperfective verbal predicates, (5); *mu*, *mū*, or *mub* with non-verbal predicates, (6); and *la* with imperatives, (7).

(5) a. *ma/*mu t-išrab ḥalīb
    NEG 2SG.M.IPfv-drink milk
    ‘You don’t drink milk.’ (after Næss 2008:69, (1b))
b. \textit{ma/*mu} kisart \textit{il-jaam} \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG break.PFV.1SG the-window-pane}  \\
‘I didn’t break the window pane.’ (after Holes 1990:71, (341))

(6) a. huwa \textit{mub/*ma} zēn \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{3SG \textit{NEG \textit{good}}}  \\
‘He is no good.’ (after Næss 2008:70, (4a))

b. huwa \textit{mū/*mu} d-drēwil \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{3SG \textit{NEG \textit{the-driver}}}  \\
‘He is not the driver.’ (after Næss 2008:70, (4b))

(7) la ta-ḥḍur-ī \textit{il-muḥādra} \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG 2SG-attend-F.IMP \textit{the-lecture}}  \\
‘Don’t attend the lecture.’ (Næss 2008:70, (3))

Existential \textit{fī} is negated with the verbal negative marker \textit{ma} and not \textit{mu} or \textit{la} (Qafisheh 1977:240, Holes 1990:72):

(8) a. \textit{ma/*mu/*la} fii gahwa waayid \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG COP coffee.F.SG much}  \\
‘There isn’t much coffee.’ (after Qafisheh 1977:201, (18))

b. \textit{ma/*mu/*la} fii ṭamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG COP tomatoes.F.PL in the-greenhouse the-big}  \\
‘There aren’t tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (after Qafisheh 1977:201, (16))

(9) a. \textit{ma/*mu/*la} fii siyarat barar \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG COP cars.F.PL outside}  \\
‘There are not cars outside.’

b. \textit{ma/*mu/*la} fii shīrāt daxil \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG COP police.F.SG inside}  \\
‘There is not a police officer inside.’

The second piece of evidence that \textit{fī} is a verb comes from its behavior with the past tense auxiliary \textit{kaan} ‘AUX.PAST’. \textit{Kaan} is followed by an inflected main verb and indicates past-in-the-past when followed by a perfective verb or future-in-the-past when followed by an imperfective verb (Holes 1990:187). \textit{Fī} may follow \textit{kaan} (Qafisheh 1977:202), supporting its verbal status. Observe that \textit{kaan} too is negated with the verbal negation marker \textit{ma}:

(10) a. kaan fii qalim \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{AUX.PAST COP pen}  \\
‘There was a pen.’

b. ma kaan fii ṭamaat fi li-greenhooz l-9ood \textit{GA}  \\
\textit{NEG AUX.PAST COP tomato in the-greenhouse the-big}  \\
‘There weren’t any tomatoes in the big greenhouse.’ (Qafisheh 1977:201, (20))
An alternative analysis of GA *fi* that we reject is that *fi* is still a preposition in these existential contexts. Negation, stress patterns, and the possibility of stranding indicate that this is not correct. The negative morpheme *ma* does not precede prepositional phrases in GA; instead, the nonverbal predicate negator *mu, mū, or mub* is used:

(11) alqlam mu/*ma fi alsindōq
    the.pens NEG in the.box
    ‘The pens are not in the box.’

Stress patterns also argue against analyzing *fi* here as a preposition. The preposition *fi* normally cannot be stressed, (12), while *fi* in existential constructions bears stress (indicated by boldfacing), (13).

(12) a. ana *fi* albeit
    I in home
    ‘I am at home.’

    b. *ana *fi* albeit

(13) *fi*iḥ siyarah
    COP car
    ‘There is a car.’

Finally, it has been observed in the literature that Arabic prepositions cannot stand on their own. When the object of a preposition is displaced, a pronominal clitic must appear following the preposition. That is, Arabic does not allow preposition stranding (Aoun et al. 2010:130):

(14) a. ana Tabaxt il-ghada li D-Dyuuf
    I cooked the-lunch for the-guests
    ‘I cooked lunch for the guests.’ (Holes 1990:102, (520))

    b. hum iD-Dyuuf illi Tabaxt li-*(hum) il-ghada
    3PL the-guests that cooked for-3PL the-lunch
    ‘It was the guests that I cooked lunch for.’ (Holes 1990:104, (520n))

(15) a. ta9allamt 9arabi *fi* l-kweet
    learned.1SG Arabic in the-Kuwait
    ‘I learned Arabic in Kuwait.’

    b. hiya l-kweet illi ta9allamt 9arabic *fi*-*(ha)
    3SG.F the-Kuwait that 1SG.learned Arabic in-3SG.F
    ‘It was Kuwait that I learned Arabic in.’ (Holes 1990:106, (527))

In the examples above, the clitics -*hum/ha* are obligatory when the object of the preposition is displaced. However, GA *fi* in existential contexts can stand by itself, without an enclitic:
We conclude that *fi* in GA has two distinct uses: a prepositional use and a verbal use as a copula verb ‘be’.

3. *Fi* in GPA

GPA *fi* was borrowed from GA and thus we expect to see similar uses; however, additional uses have been claimed in the literature (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, Bakir 2010). We survey these here.

First, as in GA, *fi* retains a prepositional use, at least in Bakir’s (2010) data, (17). We will not have anything more to say about this use.

(17) a. ʔanaa *fi* leel guum yabi ruuh yišrab maay GPA
   1SG in night stand want go drink water
   ‘At night, I got up to go and drink some water.’ (Bakir 2010:208, (5))

   b. hatteeti *fi* jidir ...
      2SG,PFV in pan
      ‘Put them in the sauce pan ...’ (Bakir 2010:209, (8))

Second, again as in GA, GPA *fi* is used in existentials:

(18) a. *fi* muškil GPA
      COP problem
      ‘There is a problem.’ (Bakir 2010:215, (19a))

   b. ʔašaan *fi* nafar yiji GPA
      because COP person come
      ‘Because there is someone coming.’ (Bakir 2010:215, (19c))

   c. *fi* aqlam baqala GPA
      COP pen.PL grocery
      ‘There are pens in the grocery.’

Smart 1990 is the first discussion in the literature of *fi*.² Smart 1990:100-102 claims that *fi* is a copula verb in this and other uses, an assertion that we will argue for below. More recently, others have analyzed *fi* in such existential constructions rather differently however. Bakir 2010 glosses *fi* as English ‘there’, suggesting that he believes that it is an expletive subject. Similarly, Næss 2008:79 proposes that *fi* is an “expletive predicate”, citing Moro 2006. We take Næss to mean that *fi* is a nonverbal predicate whose underlying subject of predication is the pivot of the

² Although we take seriously Smart’s (1990) claims about GPA, we do not use his data directly. Næss 2008:23 suggests that Smart’s (1990) data is largely foreigner talk: data supplied by native Arabic speakers attempting to imitate GPA. Bakir 2010:202 notes that Smart’s corpus is “based mainly on analyzing excerpts from mock news and commentaries in newspapers in the UAE in which GPA is used. These texts were composed by native speakers of Arabic imitating GPA”.

13
existential clause. The predicate $fi$ then raises to the subject position of the clause.\(^3\) To illustrate, in the expletive construction in (19), the subject of predication is $\text{muʃkil} \text{ 'problem'}$ and the predicate is $fi$ under Næss’s suggestion. This subject-predicate relationship is mediated via a Predicate Phrase (PredP) (see Bowers 1993, Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996) in which the subject of predication is in the specifier of PredP and the predicate is the complement of the Pred head. $Fi$ then undergoes predicate inversion (movement) to the surface syntactic subject position of the clause, the specifier of TP.

(19) a. $fi \text{ muʃkil GPA}$
    $fi \text{ problem}$
    ‘There is a problem.’

b. 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{TP} \\
\text{XP} \quad T' \\
\text{fi} \\
\text{T} \quad \text{PredP} \\
\text{DP} \quad \text{Pred'} \\
\text{muʃkil} \quad \text{‘problem’ Pred} \quad <\text{XP}> \\
\text{fi}
\end{array}
\]

Although this analysis differs in certain details from Bakir’s claim, it is alike in placing $fi$ in the syntactic subject position of the clause. We will argue against this below.

Næss 2008:88-91 suggests that $fi$ also has uses as a tense-aspect-mood (TAM) marker. It is claimed to mark continuous aspect in (20), factuality in (21), and hypotheticality in (22).

(20) a. $\text{allèm yāni fī šūf, wāhed fī šīl kūb gul hāda kūb GPA}$
    $\text{learn that.is TAM see one TAM take cup say DEM cup}$
    ‘I learned from watching, someone would take a cup and say this is a cup.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (12a))

b. $\text{ḥamsa sana fī tālim dāhil jāma GPA}$
    $\text{five year TAM study in university}$
    ‘I studied at the university for five years.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (12b))

c. $\text{binti fī āti māl walad GPA}$
    $\text{daughter TAM give to son}$
    ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (13a))

\(^3\) Here and below, we distinguish between SUBJECT OF PREDICATION, which can be understood as the external argument of the clause’s predicate and SYNTACTIC SUBJECT of the clause, which is the element residing in the syntactic subject position.
(21) alhīn fī talāk  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{now TAM divorce} \]
\[ \text{‘I’m divorced now.’} \quad (\text{Næss 2008:89, (15)}) \]

(22) aleyn fī sakkar mahal, bādēn yēsīr dubay ...  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{now TAM close shop then go Dubai} \]
\[ \text{ma fī fayda fūlūs ma fī} \quad \text{NEG EXPL use money NEG EXPL} \]
\[ \text{‘If I close the shop and go to Dubai, there’s no use in that, then I don’t get paid.’} \]
\[ \text{Context: A2 explains why he has not been to Dubai} \quad (\text{Næss 2008:90, (16a)}) \]

Bakir 2010:217 cites a similar modal use for \( fī \) based on the examples in (23), which convey “a modality tone, expressing ability or possibility “.

(23) a. fī baddil kafiil  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{fī change sponsor} \]
\[ \text{‘Can I change the sponsor?’} \quad (\text{Bakir 2010:218, (22b)}) \]

b. laakin minni minni ?inti fī ruuh, maamaa maaфи maluum  
\[ \text{but here here 2SG.F fī go mother not known} \]
\[ \text{‘But if you may go here and there, your mother wouldn’t know.’} \quad (\text{Bakir 2010:218, (22f)}) \]

Third, Bakir 2010:217 observes that \( fī \) seems to have a use as a verb of possession ‘have’, a use that Smart 1990:102 also notes and calls “associative”:

(24) a. haadi maa-fīi slop  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{this not-fīi slope} \]
\[ \text{‘This does not have a slope.’} \quad \text{(after Bakir 2010:218, (22c))} \]

b. ?anaa fīi šugul, ?anaa maa-fīi muškila  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{1SG fīi work 1SG not-fīi problem} \]
\[ \text{‘If I have work I don’t have a problem.’} \quad \text{(after Bakir 2010:218, (22g))} \]

c. ?anaa fīi koof maamaa  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{1SG BE fear(N) madam} \]
\[ \text{lit. ‘I have fear of Madam’} \]
\[ \text{‘I am afraid of Madam.’} \quad \text{(Bakir 2010:216, (20c))} \]

d. ana ma fī bēt  
\[ \text{GPA} \quad \text{1SG NEG EXPL house} \]
\[ \text{‘I don’t have a house.’} \quad \text{(Næss 2008:73, (13))} \]
Finally, there is a use of *fi* as a copula verb or marker of predication (Smart 1990:100-102, Næss 2008:81-83, Bakir 2010:216-217). We take a copula to be a verbal form that syntactically connects a subject with a predicate (see Al-Horais, 2005:102, Aoun et al. 2010:ch. 2). The examples below show *fi* linking a subject with non-verbal predicates: an adjectival predicate, (25a,b,c), adverbial predicate, (25d), and a nominal predicate, (25e).

(25) a. huwa fi bakistānī ana fi hindi
   GPA
   3SG COP Pakistani 1SG COP Indian
   ‘He is Pakistani, I am Indian.’
   (Næss 2008:81-82, (3a))

b. ana fi zeyn māl hindi
   GPA
   1SG COP good PREP India
   ‘I’m well [when I’m] in India.’
   (Næss 2008:82, (3c))

c. ?inta fī i majnuun
   GPA
   2SG.M COP crazy
   ‘Are you crazy?’
   (Bakir 2010:216, (20a))

d. ?anaa fī i hnni
   GPA
   1SG COP here
   ‘I am here.’
   (Bakir 2010:216, (20e))

e. haadaa fī i wakīt ma‘āl filīm
   GPA
   this COP time of film
   ‘Is this a time for a movie?’
   (Bakir 2010:216, (20f))

What is most interesting is that *fi* also appears with verbal predicates, (26), which would seem to suggest a use beyond that of a copula, as copulas typically do not appear with verbs.

(26) a. ?anaa fī i guul
   GPA
   1SG COP say
   ‘I say.’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20a))

b. ?inta fī i yaskit
   GPA
   2SG.M COP be.silent
   ‘You keep quiet.’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))

c. ?inti fī i šuuf
   GPA
   2SG.F COP see
   ‘Do you see?’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20c))

d. ?inta fī i saafir
   GPA
   2SG.M COP travel
   ‘Are you traveling?’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20d))

e. ?anaa fī i ruuh warša
   GPA
   1SG COP go workshop
   ‘I go to the workshop.’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20e))
f. kafill fii sawwi jinjal
   sponsor fii make quarrel
   ‘The sponsor quarrels (with me).’
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20f))

g. haay faatora maa-fii ?aktib
   this receipt not-fii write
   ‘I can’t write this receipt.’
   (after Bakir 2010:217, (20g))

h. binti fî āti mâl walad
   daughter TAM give PREP son
   ‘My daughter gives [it] to my son.’
   (Næss 2008:66, (26b))

i. mâl malâbîs ana fî šugl
   PREP clothes 1SG TAM work
   ‘I work with clothes.’
   (Næss 2008:67, (26d))

All authors note that with the marker of predication use, fi is optional with both non-verbal and verbal predicates.4

(27) a. ana hindi mafi hâda sekl
   1SG Indian NEG DEM manner
   ‘I am Indian, [so] it’s not like that.’
   (Næss 2008:82, (4b))

b. ?intii waajid girgir
   2SG.F much talk
   ‘You are very talkative.’
   (Bakir 2010:218, (23a))

c. ?anaa tabaan
   1SG tired
   ‘I am tired.’
   (Bakir 2010:218, (23b))

d. ?intii šuuf filim
   2SG.F see film
   ‘Are you watching movies?’
   (Bakir 2010:219, (23c))

e. ?anaa sawwi tanziif
   1SG make cleaning
   ‘I am cleaning.’
   (Bakir 2010:219, (23e))

To summarize, the following uses have been claimed for fi:

(28) a. preposition (Bakir 2010)
    b. expletive subject or expletive predicate (Næss 2008:79, Bakir 2010)
    d. possessive main verb ‘have’ (Smart 1990:102, Bakir 2010:217)
    e. predication copula (Smart 1990, Næss 2008:80, Bakir 2010:215)

---

4 For some speakers, our investigations suggest that fi is obligatory in the non-verbal predicate contexts.
We propose in the next section that, beyond the prepositional use, the only other use of fi is as a predicational copula verb. The putative uses in (28b,c,d) and the appearance of fi with verbs can be accounted for as instances of this use.

4. The analysis

This section presents our structural analysis of fi. In section 4.1 we propose that it is a verb. We show how this analysis accounts for the predicational copula and existential uses of fi. The subsequent subsections reanalyze non-copula uses of fi in (28) as copular uses within our analysis. Section 4.2 argues against Bakir and Næss’s claim that fi is an expletive subject. In section 4.3, we reconsider uses of fi translated with possessive ‘have’ and show how they are assimilated into our analysis. Section 4.4 considers examples where fi seems to followed by a verb, which are seemingly problematic for our analysis. We claim that such elements are not actually verbs. Finally, in section 4.5 we claim that none of the putative TAM uses actually necessitates such an analysis. We propose that these additional aspectual and modal interpretations derive from context not fi.

4.1. The copula fi

We propose that there is a unified use of fi as a predication-introducing copula verb, functioning similarly to English be. Fi is a verb that takes a non-verbal predicate as its complement. We adopt the structure for copula clauses from Baker 2003 and Mikkelsen 2005 in (29). The copula is a verb that takes a Pred(ication) Phrase as its complement. The complement to Pred’ is the non-verbal AP, PP, or DP predicate of the clause while the specifier of PredP is the subject of predication.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
TP \\
\downarrow \\
T' \\
\downarrow \\
T \\
\downarrow \\
VP \\
\downarrow \\
V \\
\downarrow \\
fii \\
\downarrow \\
DP \\
\downarrow \\
Pred \\
\downarrow \\
Pred' \\
\downarrow \\
XP = AP, PP, DP
\end{array}
\]

For example, the structure and derivation of (30a) is (30b). The subject ana ‘1SG’ originates in the specifier of PredP and moves to the canonical subject position, the specifier of TP.

\[
(30) \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{ana fi zeyn (māl hindi) GPA} \\
& 1SG \ COP \ \text{good} \ PREP \ India \\
& \text{‘I’m well [when I’m] in India.’} \quad (\text{Næss 2008:82, (3c))}
\end{align*}
\]
As fi is not obligatory in such cases, see (27), we assume without argument that the verbal head occupied by fi can also contain a null verb that also selects PredP.

Existential constructions use the same structure except that the subject of the clause is a null expletive and the pivot of the existential (the subject of predication) remains inside PredP. It does not move to spec,TP:

(31) a. fi fi aqlam baqala aqlam baqala
fi fi pen.PL grocery grocery
‘There are pens in the grocery.’

As in English, it is expected that the expletive will impose a definiteness restriction on the PredP-internal pivot.

Baker 2003 argues that VPs are different in that only they are true predicates and are able to license a specifier to which they assign a theta role. Their external argument originates in spec,VP (Kuroda 1988, Koopman and Sportiche 1991, Chomsky 1995). Thus, PredP is
unnecessary in verbal clauses. The structure of a verbal clause in GPA would be as in (32b) for the example in (32a).

(32) a. ?inti ſuuf filim?
   2SG.F see film
   ‘Have you seen the film?’ (Bakir 2010:207, (3c))

b. TP
   DP T'  
   ?inti T VP
   ‘2SG.F’
   DP V'  
   ?inti V DP
   ‘2SG.F’šuuf ‘see’ filim ‘film’

For GPA, this predicts that fi will not appear with verbs. This is not obviously true given examples like (26). We return to such examples below and propose that such sentences are not verbal, despite appearances.

Our analysis of fi as a verb is supported by negation in GPA. As discussed above, negation in GA takes one of three forms: ma with perfective or imperfective verbal predicates, mu, mü, or mub with non-verbal predicates and la with imperatives. Næss 2008:71 indicates that this system has been simplified in GPA. In GPA, ma is used in front of verbs, (33), and a new negative particle mafi is used for non-verbal predicates and imperatives, (34) and (35).

(33) a. ana ma tibba istogol
   1SG NEG want work
   ‘I wanted to quit.’ (Næss 2008:71, (7a))

b. ana maa yadri
   1SG NEG know
   ‘I don’t know.’ (Bakir 2010:219, (24a))

c. ... ?ašaan maa sawwi maamaa jinjaal
   so.that NEG make Madam quarrel
   ‘... so that Madam doesn’t quarrel (with you).’ (Bakir 2010:220, (24d))

(34) a. bas hāda ... riyyāl mafi zēn
   but DEM man NEG good
   ‘But the husband is not nice.’ (Næss 2008:75, (17b))

---

Næss 2008:71 and Bakir 2010:219 state that mafi is sometimes used in front of verbs in their data. This does not affect our point as crucially the reverse does not hold: ma is not used with non-verbal predicates.
b. ... ‘umān alhīn mafi ġalī
    Oman now NEG expensive
    ‘... Oman nowadays isn’t expensive.’  (Næss 2008:75, (18b))

c. mafi kull yōm
    NEG every day
    ‘not every day’  (Næss 2008:75, (19a))

d. same-same avocado mapi avocado, tānī.
    same-INT avocado NEG avocado other
    ‘It’s like avocado, but it’s not avocado, it’s something else.’
    (Næss 2008:75, (20a))

e. hāda namūna aleyn hāda mafi mustamil, ...
    this type now DEM NEG used
    ‘Nowadays these aren’t used....’  (Næss 2008:76, (21a))

(35) ... la mama mafi rūḥ šugl ...  GPA
    no mother NEG go.IMP work
    ‘... No mama, don’t go to work, ...’  (Næss 2008:74, (14))

These authors observe that ma, and not mafi, is used in front of fi, (36). This is identical to the situation in GA, (8) and (9). Given that we claim that fi is a verb, this pattern of negation with fi is expected.

(36) a. maa-fī muškil
    NEG-COP problem
    ‘There is no problem.’  (Bakir 2010:215, (19d))

b. ana ma fi bēt
    1SG NEG COP house
    ‘I don’t have a house.’  (Næss 2008:73, (13))

4.2. fi is not an expletive subject

Our analysis claims that fi is a verb and that the subject of clauses with fi is either a null expletive or the subject of predication. In contrast, Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 suggest that fi itself is the subject of existential clauses, roughly equivalent to English there as in ‘There is a problem’. The behavior of negation argues against this analysis. If fi were an expletive in existentials like (37a), one would expect negation to follow the subject and take the form mafi, which is not found, (37b).

(37) a. fi aqlam baqala
    fi pens grocery
    ‘There are pens in the grocery.’

---

6 Næss 2008:76 indicates that mustamil ‘used’ is etymologically related to a participle in GA and suggests that it has been reanalyzed as an adjective in GPA. We concur with this suggestion.
Further support for our analysis comes from a comparison to existential constructions in Hindi, one of the substrate languages of GPA (Smart 1990, Næss 2008). Existential constructions in Hindi use a morpheme honā ‘be’, which is a verb given its inflection and position—Hindi is head-final. Such sentences lack an overt expletive (Freeze 1992). Except for word order, then, GPA and Hindi look alike.

(38) a. ek dikkat he
    Hindi
    one problem AUX.3SG.PRES
    ‘There is a problem.’

b. kamree-mēē aadmii hai
    Hindi
    room-in man COP.3SG.MASC.PRES
    There is a man in the room.’
    (Freeze 1992:555, (3b))

To summarize, we propose that fi in GPA is a verb. It selects a predication phrase that introduces non-verbal predication. In the remaining subsections we show how this analysis can be extended to the other uses of fi proposed in the literature.

4.3. Possessive fi

Smart, Næss, and Bakir all observe possessive uses for fi, repeated below in (39), with further examples in (40). We claim that a separate analysis is not required to accommodate this use.

(39) a. haadi maa-fiī slop
    GPA
    this NEG-COP slope
    ‘This does not have a slope.’
    (after Bakir 2010:218, (22c))

b. ḥanaa fii šugul, ḥanaa maa-fiī muškil
    GPA
    1SG COP work 1SG NEG-COP problem
    ‘If I have work I don’t have a problem.’
    (after Bakir 2010:218, (22g))

c. ḥanaa fii koof maamaa
    GPA
    1SG COP fear(N) madam
    ‘I am afraid of Madam.’
    (Bakir 2010:216, (20c))

d. ana ma fi bēt
    GPA
    1SG NEG COP house
    ‘I don’t have a house.’
    (Næss 2008:73, (13))

(40) a. howa fi folos
    GPA
    3SG.M COP money
    ‘He has money.’
b. \( \hat{\text{ʔinta}} \) fi kafil kowes
   \( 2\text{SG COP boss good} \)
   ‘You have a good boss.’

In GA there is no verb ‘have’. Possession is indicated by a preposition, with the prepositional phrase in subject position:⁷

(41) a. 9\text{ind-i} arba\( \text{9} \) yih\( \text{a} \)al
   with-1\text{SG four children}
   lit. “With me are four children”
   ‘I have four children.’ (Holes 1990:95, (482))

b. 9\text{ind-na} Hurriyya
   with-1\text{PL} freedom
   lit. “With us is freedom”
   ‘We have freedom.’ (Holes 1990:95, (483))

A similar pattern is also found in the substrate language Hindi, which uses the copula honā ‘be’ plus a preposition paas, glossed ‘proximity’ for alienable possession:

(42) a. larke-ke paas kutt\( \text{aa} \) hai
   boy.OBL-GEN near dog COP.3SG.PRES
   ‘The boy has a dog.’ (after Freeze 1992:576, (47b))

b. us-ke paas pais\( \text{a} \) hai
   3SG.OBL-GEN near money COP.3SG.PRES
   ‘He has money.’

Freeze 1992 argues extensively for a derivational relationship between existential sentences and possessive structures. Such a relationship would immediately account for the possessive use of \( fi \) in GPA with no further mechanisms. In the derivation of an existential clause, the subject position is occupied by an expletive, (31b), and both the subject of predication and the non-verbal predicate remain in-situ. In the possessive structure the non-verbal predicate is the possessor, which counts as a location and which is typically expressed as a prepositional phrase in other languages (Freeze 1992). In possessive structures, this PP predicate moves to the syntactic subject position, spec,TP. An example in GPA is given in (43). ‘I have a problem’ is more literally, “At me is a problem” with the possessor functioning as a locative subject. In a language like GPA that largely lacks prepositions, the locative subject is expressed as a nominal, perhaps with a null preposition, as shown.⁸

---

⁷ The prepositional analysis of 9\text{ind} (Holes 1990:95) might not be correct but we leave that for later exploration.

⁸ Two theoretical issues arise with respect to (43): Why the PP moves to spec,TP and how it can do so, crossing the DP, in apparent violation of locality. We assume that the movement is driven by the EPP and is allowed because the PP and the DP are equidistant in some sense from T. The issues are beyond the scope of the paper but are explored in Harves 2002, Bailyn 2004, Mikkelsen 2005, and Landau 2010, among others.
24

The similarity to both Arabic and Hindi is evident. In Arabic the word order is as in (41), where the possessor is a PP and appears initially as the subject, just as in GPA. GPA however lacks the preposition and Arabic lacks the predicational copula. In Hindi, (42), there is once again a clause-initial locative PP subject, however the predication relationship between it and the possessed element is mediated by a copula, just as in GPA with fi. Freeze 1992 discusses other languages that unify existential structures and possessive structures. The fact that this reappears in GPA is thus unsurprising and is compatible with our unified analysis of fi as a predicational copula.

4.4. fi with verbs data

Given our analysis of fi as a predicational copula found with non-verbal predicates, we do not expect fi to co-occur with verbs. Various data in Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 repeated below seems to contradict this expectation. The boldfaced elements following fi look like verbs.

(44) a. ءانا fii guul
    1SG fii say
    ‘I say.’  (Bakir 2010:217, (20a))

b. ءinta fii yaskit
    2SG.M fii be.silent
    ‘You keep quiet.’  (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))

c. ءنط fii šuuf
    2SG.F fii see
    ‘Do you see?’  (Bakir 2010:217, (20c))
We claim that such data are not actually problematic for our proposal. Although the elements following fi appear to be verbs, and may be verbs in GA, they are not viewed as verbs by GPA speakers. Consequently, the possibility of fi is expected and is compatible with our analysis. The apparent exceptional elements following fi divide into three groups: nouns, stative adjectives, and imperatives. We treat them in turn. We use negation as an independent test to determine the category of the word in GPA. Remember that verbs are negated in GPA with ma. If a lexical item cannot be negated with ma then this suggests that it is not a verb. Such cases will thus not be genuine instances of fi co-occurring with a verb.

In some cases, the element following fi is translated into English as a verb but the morphosyntax of the word indicates that it is a noun. Examples include (44d,i) above, and repeated below as (45a,b), which contain saafir ‘travel’ and šugl ‘work’ as well as two additional examples in (45c,d) with talāk ‘divorce’ and kalām ‘speech’.

(45) a. ʔinta fii saafir GPA
2SG.M COP travel ‘Are you traveling?’ (Bakir 2010:217, (20d))

b. māl malābis ana fii šugl GPA
PREP clothes 1SG COP work ‘I work with clothes.’ (Næss 2008:67, (26d))

c. alhīn fii talāk GPA
now COP divorce ‘Now I am divorced.’ (Næss 2008:90, (15))
In the case of (45b,c) at least, a possessive paraphrase is appropriate: “I have work with clothes” and “I have divorce”. It is thus only the supplied English translation that is misleading. That these words are not verbs in GPA is indicated by the fact that the above examples cannot be negated with ma but instead use the non-verbal negator mafi:

(46) a. ?inta mafii/*ma saafir  
   2SG.M NEG travel.N  
   ‘You are not traveling.’  

b. alhīn mafii/*ma talāk  
   now NEG divorce.N  
   ‘Now I am not divorced.’

c. ana mafii/*ma kalām mišān huwa  
   1SG NEG speech.N PREP 3SG  
   ‘I am not talking to him.’

A handful of examples involve a verb that has plausibly been reanalyzed by GPA speakers as an adjective, since they are stative. 9 Two of Bakir’s examples are below.

(47) a. ?inta fii yaskit  
   2SG.M fii be.silent  
   ‘You keep quiet.’  
   (Bakir 2010:217, (20b))

b. ana fii maluum  
   1SG BE known  
   ‘I know.’  
   (Bakir 2010:216, (20d))

The example in (23b) confirms that maluum in (47b) is negated with mafi. This is confirmed by our own data:

(48) a. ?inta mafii/*ma yaskit  
   2SG.M NEG be.silent  
   ‘You don’t keep quiet.’

b. ana mafii/*ma maluum  
   1SG NEG known.Adj  
   ‘I don’t know.’

Finally, the remaining examples above involve fi followed by elements that are imperative verbs in GA: (44a,c,e,f,g). For reasons that we do not understand, GPA speakers seem to be taking imperative verbs as non-verbal. While we do not have an explanation for this, nor do we

---

9 See Bakir 2010:216, footnote 10 for a similar suggestion.
know how exactly the verbs are being analyzed, the pattern seems clear. Note that it is not the case that the imperative verb form is the form of a verb generally borrowed into GPA. Bakir 2010:205-211 discusses verb forms in GPA and indicates that “the common verb form that is used in GPA is the Gulf Arabic 3rd person masculine imperfect form (Bakir 2010:206)”. In support of this conclusion, Bakir (2010:207) observes that when the imperative and imperfective verb stems are distinct, GPA uses the imperfective.10 11

4.5. TAM fi

Næss 2008 and Bakir 2010 presented data, repeated below, which they took to show that fi can convey aspectual and modality semantics. This section reconsiders such examples.

(49) a. allem yāni fi šūf, wāhed fi šīl kūb gul hāda kūb GPA
    learn that.is TAM see one TAM take cup say DEM cup
    ‘I learned from watching, someone would take a coup and say this is a cup.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (12a))

    b. ḥamsa sana fī tālim dāhil jāma GPA
      five year TAM study in university
      ‘I studied at the university for five years.’
      (Næss 2008:89, (12b))

    c. binti fī āti māl walad GPA
       daughter TAM give to son
       ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’
       (Næss 2008:89, (13a))

    d. alhiin ?anaa fī guum GPA
       now 1SG fi stand
       ‘Now I am standing.’
       (Bakir 2010:212, (13))

(50) alhīn fī talāk GPA
    now TAM divorce
    ‘I’m divorced now.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (15))

10 Bakir 2010:210 does acknowledge that the choice of verb form for any given GPA speaker is influenced to some extent by what forms that speaker is exposed to.
11 One example remains for which we have no account:

(i) binti fī āti māl walad GPA
    daughter COP give to son
    ‘My daughter is feeding my son.’
    (Næss 2008:89, (13a))

Āti in GA is the first singular present form of the verb ‘give’. It is possible that this form is also seen as an imperative by GPA speakers, even though it is not morphologically imperative in GA. It is used imperatively:

(i) āti ana folos GPA
    give 1SG money
    ‘Give me money!’
(51) aleyn fi sakkar mahal, bādēn yeşīr dubay ... GPA
now TAM close shop then go Dubai
ma fī fayda fulūs ma fī
NEG EXPL use money NEG EXPL
‘If I close the shop and go to Dubai, there’s no use in that, then I don’t get paid.’
Context: A2 explains why he has not been to Dubai (Næss 2008:90, (16a))

(52) a. fii baddil kafiil GPA
fii change sponsor
‘Can I change the sponsor?’ (Bakir 2010:218, (22b))

b. laakin minni minni ?inti fii ruuh, maamaa maafii maluum GPA
but here here 2SG.F fii go mother not known
‘But if you may go here and there, your mother wouldn’t know.’
(Bakir 2010:218, (22f))

Evidence that fi is not contributing TAM semantics here comes from the fact that the meaning of these sentences does not change if fi is deleted. For example, consider the synonymous pair in (53), based on (49d) above.

(53) alhiin ?anaa (fii) guum GPA
now 1SG COP stand
‘Now I am standing.’

The TAM meanings are simply a consequence of the context of utterance, not the morpheme fi itself. As one can see, numerous previous examples have no additional modal or aspectual interpretation.

5. Conclusion

This paper has reconsidered the syntactic function and analysis of the morpheme fi in Gulf Pidgin Arabic, which derives from the existential verb fii(h) in Gulf Arabic. Previous discussion of this morpheme (Smart 1990, Næss 2008, Bakir 2010) has proposed that it has several uses: as a preposition, an existential expletive, a verb of possession ‘have’, a TAM marker, and a predicational copula. We argued that GPA fi is only ever a preposition or a predicational copula verb and that the other suggested uses of fi can and should be reduced to the predicational copula use. Fi is a verbal head that selects for a non-verbal predication. In relying on Freeze 1992, our analysis supports Freeze’s unification of existential, possessive, and locative clauses.

Our analysis of fi as a predicational copula provides evidence against Ferguson’s (1971) claim that pidgins and other simplified communication languages uniformly lack copulas. Other potential copulas in pidgin languages included nà ím in Nigerian pidgin and èm in Tok Pisin (Faraclas 1990:97) as well as bilong in Chinese Pidgin English (Frankin 1981).
References


Author contact information:

Eric Potsdam: potsdam@ufl.edu
Mohammad Alanazi: mohammad3s@hotmail.com
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.